

Maharlika

PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

Vol. 1 No. 26 • www.saipantribune.com

A PUBLICATION OF THE SAIPAN TRIBUNE

Saturday, July 22, 2006

Pinoys on Rota

A group of Filipinos here wants to have access to free short courses on skills enhancement being sponsored by the Saipan-based Philippine Consulate General.

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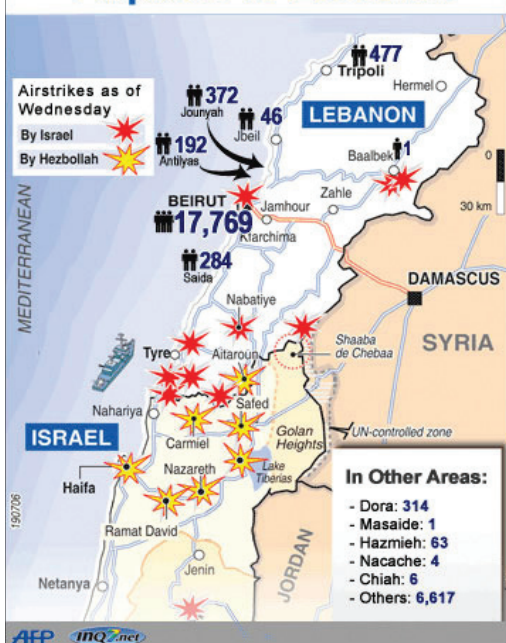
Evacuation

Villagers living near the Mayon volcano were evacuating or preparing to early Thursday, spooked by several ash explosions on the slopes of the lava-spilling mountain.

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Filipinos in Lebanon



Location map of overseas Filipino workers in war-torn Lebanon based on the data provided by the Philippine Association of Mediterranean Agencies Deploying Labours. JUSTIN CALINGASAN, INQ7/AFP

ARROYO ASKS WARRING FORCES IN LEBANON

'Don't shoot Filipinos'

P150M released for evacuation

By LIRA DALANGIN-FERNANDEZ
INQ7.NET

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has appealed to "all combatant forces" in Lebanon not to shoot Filipinos, as she ordered crisis managers to devise "markers" that would identify the migrant workers.

At the same time, the President ordered the release of 150 million pesos for the Filipinos' evacuation of some

30,000 Filipinos from the war-torn state, even as she urged the international community to help evacuate her citizens.

Facing criticism for failing to do enough to help Filipinos stuck in the war zone, many of whom are female domestic workers, Arroyo insisted her government was doing everything it could.

"The Philippines makes a special appeal to all combatant forces to spare Filipino nationals who have no wish other than to be taken out of harm's way," Arroyo said Thursday in a speech at the Sulong Negosyo, an

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Distribution of OFWs in Lebanon

This is the distribution of overseas Filipino workers in Lebanon as provided by Raul De Vera Jr. of the Philippine Association of Mediterranean Agencies Deploying Labours (not Laborers as reported earlier) Inc.:

Beirut:	17,769
Tripoli:	477
Jounieh:	372
Dora:	314
Saida:	284
Antillas:	192
Hazmieh:	63

Jubail:	46
Chiah:	6
Nacache:	4
Baalbeck:	1
Masaide:	1

Others (possibly scattered in the northern Lebanon cities of El Mina, Hermel, and Batroun; and the southern Lebanon cities of Zahle, Sidon, Jazzin, Ez Zahrani, Tyre, and Noqura): 6,617

TOTAL - 26,146

(Inq7.net)

PULSE ASIA SURVEY

27 percent don't believe Arroyo SONA will be truthful

Nearly one in every four Filipinos, who are aware of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's past State of the Nation Addresses, does not believe that her next SONA, which she is set to deliver on Monday, will

be truthful, according to results of a survey by Pulse Asia Inc.

The SONA, which outlines the President's programs and policy initiatives for the year, is delivered at the joint session of the House of Representatives

and Senate to formally signal the opening of the regular session of Congress.

A considerable majority (65 percent) said they were aware of the President's previous ad-

27 PERCENT Page 2

BENJAMIN GANAPIN JR.

Art and numbers in one

By AGNES E. DONATO
REPORTER

Local painter Benjamin Ganapin Jr. taught himself everything he knows about art. He now hopes children will learn a thing or two from him, too.

Ganapin, or Mang Ben, recently concluded an art class attended by 11 children from Grace Christian Academy and Grace Christian Ministries.

For a minimal charge for supplies and utilities, the children learned some techniques in using watercolor, sketching and oil painting. They

ART Page 2



Relatives wait for their turn for a free call service for family members still trapped in Lebanon at the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration building in suburban Manila on Thursday July 20, 2006.

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PINOYNEWS

Survey shows high optimism among medium-scale businesses

Medium-scale businessmen appear to be “more optimistic” about economic prospects in the Philippines this year than in 2005, said the auditing firm of Punongbayan & Araullo, a member of global financial adviser Grant Thornton International, citing results of an annual survey.

Punongbayan released the results of Grant’s International Business Owners Survey (IBOS) for 2006, a poll of more than 7,000 owners of medium-sized businesses in 30 countries in the fourth quarter of 2005.

The international survey, begun in 2002, examines attitudes, plans and trends.

In the Philippines, Grant sampled 150 business owners of medium-sized firms with 50-199 employees. The poll showed 70 percent feel that 2006 will be a better year, compared with 50 percent in 2005.

The “optimism” is based on hopes that government finances will improve with the value-added tax, Punongbayan managing partner Gregorio Navarro said.

The tax was expanded in November include energy and

certain other previously exempt sectors, and increased in February to 12 percent from the previous 10 percent.

Navarro also said the businessmen tended to believe that there was “momentum” in the growth of the Philippine economy.

Philippine economic growth in the past decade has averaged 3.8 percent a year, modest by standards of Asian developing countries, Grant said in a research report.

However, in the past four years, it accelerated, exceeding 5.0 percent a year, bolstered

by agricultural harvests, strong exports, and buoyant consumer spending, the report said.

Low interest rates, expected to hover at around 8.0 percent, and higher savings rates are also fueling the optimism, Navarro said.

However, fewer of the medium-scale business owners, 59 percent, felt they will be profitable this year, than 62 percent in 2005, according to the survey. Navarro said this proportion was in line with the sentiment in East Asia as a whole, where 58 percent said they expected profits this year.

“It’s hard to explain the optimism of the Filipino,” Navarro told reporters. “If you look at the numbers, it looks like they are not that optimistic, because stress levels are high, but in spite of that we have registered our highest level of optimism from a negative three years ago, now it’s 71 percent, that is high optimism.”

The survey showed 42 percent of the respondents considered the cost of finance as the biggest constraint to expanding their businesses.

Thirty-four percent said bureaucratic red tape was the

biggest constraint.

On profit margins, 63 percent said the biggest pressure came from increased raw material prices, while 56 percent said it came from increased cost of fuel. In East Asia as a whole, 46 percent pointed to fuel cost.

The percentage of respondents who reported increased stressed levels rose to 76 percent 53 percent last year.

“Now more people are concerned with politics, the environment, globalization,” Navarro said. (*Elizabeth L. Sanchez, with INQ7.net*)

27 PERCENT FROM PAGE 1

dresses, with the awareness level highest in Metro Manila (83 percent) and among classes ABC (90 percent).

The number of those who believe the SONA would not be truthful dropped from 45 percent in July 2005 to 27 percent this year.

But more than half (56 percent) said they were undecided on the truthfulness of the upcoming SONA, Ms Arroyo’s sixth since 2001. This ambivalence was evident across geographic areas and socioeconomic classes.

Nearly one in two Filipinos—or around 15 million Filipino adults—is unable to say whether the President’s previous SONAs had been truthful.

Between July 2005 and July 2006, this level of indecision increased from 38 percent to 49 percent.

While the number of Filipinos who thought that the previous SONAs had not been truthful decreased from 44 percent in July 2005 to 31 percent this year, the number of Filipinos who believe in the truthfulness of the past addresses stayed at almost the same level, from 18 percent in July 2005 to 19 percent, in July 2006.

The nationwide survey was

conducted between June 24 and July 8 using face-to-face interviews of 1,200 representative adults aged 18 years and above. It has a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points.

Tell the truth

In the House, Deputy Minority Leader Alan Peter Cayetano called on Ms Arroyo to “tell the truth” in her SONA on July 24.

Cayetano said the SONA had become the platform of Presidents for “propaganda and window-dressing of their achievements,” rather than its original purpose of telling the true state of the nation and of outlining its problems and challenges.

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exhibit of small and medium entrepreneurs at the Bonifacio Global City in Taguig. “Our crisis ma

“Our crisis managers on site shall devise clear markers that will identify Filipino nationals and in the name of humanity, I ask the combatants not to shoot or harm them,” she said, while appealing for other countries to “help us in the evacuation process.”

In this conflict, Arroyo stressed that the goal was “zero casualty” for Filipinos.

Vehicles that will transport Filipinos out of the strife-torn Lebanon will be draped with huge Philippine flags to identify them as non-combatants, according to retired general Roy Cimatu, special envoy to the Middle East.

The flags will also be placed in relocation centers where some of the Filipinos are temporarily housed to, Cimatu added in a telephone patch interview with Malacañang reporters.

“We make it a point that their work sites are well identified and properly coordinatedwith our ambassador in Israel. Our identifiable relocation centers are also in place,” said Cimatu who is in Damascus, Syria to receive the first batch

of about 200 Filipinos, who left Lebanon Thursday.

Cimatu said that he had also recommended a revision of the flight plan from Damascus. Instead of flying to Dubai from Damascus and then taking a chartered plane from Dubai to Manila, Cimatu proposed that the evacuated workers be flown directly to Manila from Damascus.

Asked if there was need to raise the alert level from 3 to 4 for a full evacuation, Cimatu said they would have to assess the situation.

“We have some indicators and parameters for evacuation. We are not yet in the stage of a full war ... where big weapons and armaments are being used by both sides,” he added.

Cimatu had also spoken to the President who informed him of the release of the 150 million-peso fund.

“I have already released 150 million pesos because I understand you need two million dollars to lease the ships and the planes, so you have 150 million pesos to work with,” she said. Arroyo instruct

Arroyo instructed Cimatu to bring home the Filipinos safely.

“Just as you did in the Iraq war, okay. Yes, out of harm’s way, remember your slogan,” she said.

“We assure the families of the

trapped OFWs in Lebanon that we will exhaust all the available means to ensure their safety,” Arroyo said.

Presidential Chief of Staff Michael Defensor said the 150 million pesos was on top of the 500,000 dollars Arroyo had ordered released for evacuation.

In a statement, the Department of Budget and Management confirmed this and said 150 million pesos would be released Thursday.

The amount will be pooled under the Department of Foreign Affairs’ Assistance-to-Nationals fund, the standby fund tapped for contingencies involving Filipinos abroad, the DBM said.

In its letter to DBM, the DFA said it would use the fund for “supplies, transport and communications” needed for the “emergency relocation” of the Filipinos affected by the conflict in Lebanon.

“My understanding is that the fund can also be used for the relocation of OFWs in Israel in case they need to be brought out of harm’s way,” Budget Secretary Rolando Andaya said.

Arroyo said she also ordered Philippine diplomats to negotiate “at the political [level] and on the ground” to ensure that the Filipinos would be given safe passage, humanitarian assistance, and safe sanctuaries.

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ART FROM PAGE 1

were introduced to the terms “Cubism” and “Impressionism” and they got a lesson on still life and outdoor painting. Furthermore, they got to see their work displayed in an exhibit, aptly titled “...in the beginning.”

But the experience was a rewarding one not only for the students, but for the instructor as well.

“It was fulfilling to be able to utilize the talent and skills that God gave us. I really had fun teaching the kids and I will definitely do it again,” Ganapin said.

An accountant by profession, Ganapin is a self-taught artist who has been painting as a hobby since he was a kid himself.

He said his artistic tendency came out during a church-sponsored summer camp that he attended when he was in high school. From then on, he practically devoured whatever art book he could get his hands on, learning different art movements and techniques.

Having gained some confidence in his knowledge, the 28-year-old artist has started experimenting on his own, mixing various styles and media. Not surprisingly, people who saw his work at the Flame Tree Arts Festival a few months ago thought the paintings were done by five different artists. Judging by his success at the exhibit—he sold 29 of the 33 pieces displayed—Ganapin is pretty good at each art technique he attempted to use.

Or maybe he just has a lot of friends. “Most of the people who bought my paintings were friends. I think that’s good because I know they’ll take care of my paintings and I will have a chance to see them in the future,” he said.

But then again, there has also been some sort of demand for Ganapin’s work after April’s arts festival. Local art enthusiasts, including some business owners, are offering to purchase paintings he has yet to make. The Commonwealth Arts Council has also assured him of space in the agency’s annual Christmas exhibit.

“As a painter, I am satisfied just to know that someone is interested in my paintings. To have people like what I do is an achievement in itself,” Ganapin said.

Filipino group on Rota wants short courses

ROTA—A group of Filipinos here wants to have access to free short courses on skills enhancement being sponsored by the Saipan-based Philippine Consulate General.

"We're planning to work with the consulate on this project. We want our members here to have the same opportunity to attend short classes, like our kababayan on Saipan," said Alejandro Badilles, vice president of Filipino Community of Rota.

The group, which was founded four years ago, consists of 600 members, who work mainly in the customer service industry.

Badilles estimates that there are about 1,000 Filipinos on the island.

Although the group has not been very active in terms of conducting regular meetings, Badilles said that Filipinos here "care about each other."



Badilles

"We know each other. I'm very sure that when we have programs like self-enhancement or skills improvement, they would want to come," he said, noting that when Northern Marianas College-CRESS offered

similar programs, he saw some Filipino participants.

In general, Badilles said Filipinos here feel welcomed in the community.

"We feel welcome. People here are friendly. They also appreciate the work that Filipinos do here," he said.

The Filipino community also gets to share its culture with the local community through cultural presentations.

He said Filipinos here observe "Filipino fiesta" in January, which becomes an opportunity to showcase the country's rich culture.

"We do ati-atihan. We cook Filipino dishes for people to taste. We do a variety of cultural presentations," he said.

Badilles is currently the acting Rota NMC-CREES coordinator. *(Liberty Dones)*

OFWs get lessons on NMI labor rules

By MARCONI CALINDAS
REPORTER

The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration and the Philippine Overseas Labor Office has teamed up with the CNMI Department of Labor to educate Filipino nonresident workers on the islands of the laws governing their employment in the Northern Marianas.

Over 70 Filipino migrant workers in the CNMI trooped down to the Philippine Overseas Labor Office at the Marianas Business Plaza on the evening of July 20 to learn the rules and regulation relating to their employment in the CNMI.

The participants were mostly members of the different Filipino organization on Saipan.

OWWA welfare officer Mary Dait said both POLO and OWWA are holding continuing education seminars as an outreach program for Filipino

migrant workers to better equip them with information necessary to their employment and welfare in the Commonwealth.

Last week's seminar, said Dait, aimed to clarify the labor laws and raise some issues that affect the OFWs respective jobs.

The CNMI Department of Labor officials who graced the evening were led by Secretary Gil San Nicolas, Deputy Secretary Alfred Pangelinan, Deputy Director Jeffrey T. Camacho, Labor Enforcement director Edwin B. Camacho, Labor Processing supervisor James Ulloa and Labor director Robert Magofna.

POLO Labor Representative Joanne Lourdes Lavilla also attended the symposium.

Dait said the symposium is the first of three continuing education seminars that both POLO and OWWA are planning to conduct this month.

LABOR FRONT

Appealing a decision

By FERDIE P. DE LA TORRE
REPORTER

Q: What is the next proper step that an alien worker or an employer should do if he or she wants the Labor secretary to reconsider an order.

A: That alien worker or employer should file a motion for reconsideration. The Labor secretary may grant this motion if he or she determines there is, in fact a mistake, inadvertence, excusable neglect, newly discovered evidence, fraud, and misrepresentation.

The Labor secretary may reconsider his or her order if the judgment is void and the judgment has been satisfied, released, or discharged.

According to the Alien Labor Rules and Regulations, a notice of motion for reconsideration or re-argument shall be served within 10 days after the docketing of the Labor secretary's decision. The notice of motion should include a memorandum setting forth concisely the matters or controlling decisions that a party believes the Labor secretary has overlooked or misapprehended.

■ ■ ■

Q: How does the Department of Labor determine whether an employer qualifies to hire an alien worker?

A: The Labor's Division of Employment Services and Training will evaluate whether the employer is financially able to hire a nonresident worker and will certify the result. An employer must be determined to be financially solvent to be entitled to employ a nonresident worker. The determination of solvency is based upon the actual annual expenses of the employer in hiring an alien worker. Expenses include a guaranteed basic minimum wage and the ability to pay the workers for hours worked, room and board, food, medical expenses, health insurance when applicable, transportation and other employer expenses.

■ ■ ■

Q: How long does it take for Labor to determine that there is a resident worker available and qualified for a job vacancy?

A: The Labor's Division of Employment Services and Training has only five working days to determine whether there is a resident worker available and qualified for the vacancy, or whether there is a suitable nonresident worker. The Division of Employment Services and Training has a listing of qualified and available resident workers seeking employment, and of alien workers presently within the CNMI who may lawfully seek employment.

When there is no qualified and available resident or nonresident worker found, a job vacancy announcement is released for 15 days for publication through the media.

Submit questions on labor issues to *Saipan Tribune* via e-mail at editor@saipantribune.com, or by calling 235-6397, 235-2440, or 235-8747 and leaving a message at Ext. 133 or 135. You may also submit questions in person by writing it down and dropping it off at the *Saipan Tribune's* office on the second floor of the CIC Centre on Beach Road, Garapan.

Mutineers planned to seize RP president in February coup plot, military says

By OLIVER TEVES
AP WRITER

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—Philippine military mutineers allegedly planned to seize President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and top military and police officials in a coup plot that fizzled out in February because of a lack of time and supporters, an official said Thursday.

Rear Adm. Rufino Lopez, head of a military investigation, said there was “substantial evidence” against 25 army and 15 marine officers who were

allegedly involved in the Feb. 24-26 “aborted plan to withdraw support” from the Arroyo government.

He said his committee recommended a court martial for mutiny, failure to report or suppress mutiny, sedition, disrespect toward the president and superior officers, and other violations of the Articles of War.

The officers have been relieved of their posts and placed in custody of their commanders.

Lopez said the plot failed because the rebel officers

did not have time to gather enough forces.

“I think we have stemmed the possibility of this unrest. Forty officers as compared to 35,000 officers of the (Armed Forces of the Philippines) is not a big number,” he said.

Arroyo has accused “military adventurers,” communist rebels and civilian backers for the February plot that prompted her to declare a weeklong state of emergency.

She survived an impeachment bid over vote-rigging and corruption allegations last year,

but is facing new charges from opposition groups amid reports of restiveness in the military.

Lopez said the plot included attacks on vital facilities and actions to “secure ... the leadership and Malacanang,” the presidential palace.

He quoted a witness as saying the plan included taking hold of “the president, chief of staff and the chief of the (Philippine National Police).” The witness did not say what the plotters planned to do with the officials, Lopez told reporters.

He said 125 enlisted men also

will face summary dismissal proceedings.

The rebel officers tried to repeat the 1986 “people power” revolt that ousted late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, and the 2001 mass protests that forced President Joseph Estrada to step down, paving the way for his vice president, Arroyo, to take over, Lopez said.

“If you will look back to history, the participation of the military in those scenarios was crucial,” he said. “February 24 should have been the culmination of all the plans.”

Authorities say ex-Philippines official Bolante arrived in U.S. illegally

By SOLVEJ SCHOU
AP WRITER

LOS ANGELES (AP)—A former Philippines official who is the subject of an arrest warrant in his native country arrived in the United States nearly two weeks ago without a valid visa, authorities said.

Jocelyn Bolante, the country’s former agriculture undersecretary, was taken into custody July 7 and is being held at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s processing center in San Pedro, ICE spokeswoman Virginia Kice said Wednesday.

She said Bolante was given notice Wednesday to appear in federal court, although a hearing was not immediately scheduled. No charges have been filed, Kice said.

The Philippine Consulate General’s office in Los Angeles did not immediately respond to a request for comment Wednesday.

Bolante arrived at Los Angeles International Airport on a flight that originated in Hong Kong, said Peter Gordon, the airport’s acting port director for U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Although Bolante is named in an arrest warrant in the Philippines, Gordon said the U.S. government’s main concern is that Bolante appears to have arrived in this country illegally.

‘Peso likely to take a beating’

The peso will likely take a beating from the current conflict in the Middle East, as the uncertainty abroad may dampen investment sentiment on emerging economies like the Philippines, an official of the international bank HSBC said.

“We don’t expect the market to be confident,” said Wick Veloso, HSBC treasurer and head of global markets. “It does not make sense for [investors] to place their money in emerging economies.”

Early in the year, HSBC projected that barring economically adverse events, such as oil price volatility, the peso could strengthen to as much as 48 to the dollar because of the government’s improving financial condition.

The Israeli air strikes in Lebanon and the Hezbollah rocket attacks on Israel have created uncertainty in the international financial markets, making the movements of foreign exchange less predictable, Veloso said.

He added that the international financial market was not fully convinced that the United States Federal Reserve would stop raising US interest rates.

RP villagers leave homes near erupting volcano

By BULLIT MARQUEZ
AP WRITER

LEGAZPI, Philippines (AP)—Villagers living near the Philippines’ Mayon volcano were evacuating or preparing to early Thursday, spooked by several ash explosions on the slopes of the lava-spilling mountain.

Mushroom clouds of ash shot up into the sky starting around 7:30 a.m. (2330 GMT Wednesday), sending farmers running for safety as parents took their children home from school.

Eduardo Laguerta, from the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology, said the ash clouds were caused by the collapse and disintegration of superheated lava mounds several kilometers (miles) from the crater of the 2,474-meter (8,118-foot) volcano.

He said anyone nearby could suffocate or be severely burned.

Lava and red-hot boulders have been trickling down Mayon since it came to life Friday in a “mild and quiet” eruption, which could continue for weeks, volcanologists said.

The government has declared a no-go area in a six-kilometer (3.75-mile) zone around the crater, but several thousands still live and farm within the area and cannot be forced out until there is an official mandatory evacuation order.

Farmer Eladio Echaluze, 85, said he was working in his field at Matanag village on the volcano’s southeastern slope, when he heard a shout and saw someone pointing to a cloud of ash.

“When I saw the cloud, I got scared and came down,” he said.

Another farmer, Loreto Aydaya, rushed along carrying a sack of vegetables and leading his two water buffalos.

“I was scared because I was about a kilometer (mile) away,” he said.

School teacher Jenny Perez said parents rushed to the Matanag Elementary School to get their children.

“I could not do anything, so I just dismissed my class,” she said.

Other residents packed bags and kitchen utensils and waited on the roadside or inside their homes for village officials’ signal to evacuate.

In Lidong village in nearby Santo Domingo town, some residents were told to leave.

Alvin Rodriguez said he was worried that his family, especially his three young children, would be overwhelmed by the ash fall.

Mayon is one of the Philippines’ 22 active volcanos. Its most violent eruption, in 1814, killed more than 1,200 people and buried a town in mud. A 1993 eruption killed 79 people.

The Philippines is in the Pacific “Ring of Fire,” where volcanic activity and earthquakes are common.



Students, from left, Ariane Polidario, Sarah Manlangit and Junalyn Polidario, pause to watch the “mild” eruption of Mayon volcano after reaching the top of Linon Hill in Legazpi city about 340 kilometers (212 miles) southeast of Manila, Philippines early Wednesday July 19, 2006.

15 farmers killed, 32 hurt in road accident in central Philippine

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—At least 15 people, including two children, were killed and 32 others injured when a truck they were riding lost its brakes and crashed into an electrical pylon in a central Philippine town before dawn Thursday, officials said.

Most of the casualties were farmers, who were picked up

on a dump truck from various villages and headed to the La Libertad town center in central Negros Oriental province, 550 kilometers (340 miles) when the accident occurred, said Marilyn Ymalay, a public market manager.

“They were heading to town to sell their products on market day,” she told The Associated

Press by telephone.

Some of the fatalities were electrocuted when the impact of the truck snapped electrical cables on the power pylon, she said.

La Libertad Mayor Jocelyn Limkaichong said among the dead were at least two children.

She declined to comment on what caused the accident, saying she needed to focus first on

the victims. The truck driver and a village chief traveling with the group survived and will be investigated later, she said.

Of those hurt, 11 were hospitalized with serious injuries in the provincial capital of Dumaguete, 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of La Libertad, Limkaichong said.

The truck, owned by the

municipality, gives free rides to farmers selling products in the town center every Thursday.

“I want to encourage them to plant, but they are not encouraged because they have nowhere to sell their goods, so I subsidize their transportation,” Limkaichong said, adding the transport project started in January.

PINOYSTYLE

Supersize 'em

By BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR.
INQUIRER

On a hilly field somewhere in Tagaytay, fans have, well, a field day ogling the stars of the forthcoming ABS-CBN fantaserye "Super Inggo."

Intermittent shrieks—"Sam!" and "Makisig!"—interrupt the taping, making TV director Gilbert Perez see red.

But the fans of Sam Concepcion (Boy Bawang) and Makisig Morales (Budong or Super Inggo) are incorrigible.

Sam graciously gives in to requests for autographs and snapshots. He is joined by his partner, Empress Schuck, a.k.a. Ava Abaniko, in greeting the fans.

The autograph session over, Empress retreats to a corner and texts away.

Between takes, Makisig prefers to rest. "But I also do my homework," he says. "My dad brings my school books to the set."

Likewise for Sam and Empress.

"I read my modules," Empress says.

"I bring my laptop. I'm enrolled in the computer-based home-school program of the Christian Academy of Manila," Sam volunteers.

"That's precisely the advice I give my young co-stars—to study hard," says Herbert Bautista, who portrays Commander Bawang, father of Boy Bawang and principal of Power Academy.

Lest we forget, this grassy knoll is substituting for the fictional Power Academy, a school for young superheroes.

Think "X-Men," local version, with pop culture and komiks icons from 1980s Viva, Regal and Seiko movies as lead characters.

With computer technology, says executive producer Mio Siojo, the open field will become the futuristic campus, complete with flying super-teachers and -students.

Pipe down

Meanwhile, Perez pleads with the fans to pipe down because they are using "live sound."

That's third world TV magic!

In spite of the frayed nerves and tight shooting sked, cast and crew manage to have a blast.

Empoy Marquez, a.k.a. Petrang Kabayo, horses around with co-stars, while the horse that plays Empoy's animal-alter ego is contentedly feasting on the grass.

Child star Jacob Dionisio, a.k.a. Transformed POD the kontribida, is playing Game of the Generals with a fellow kid actor.

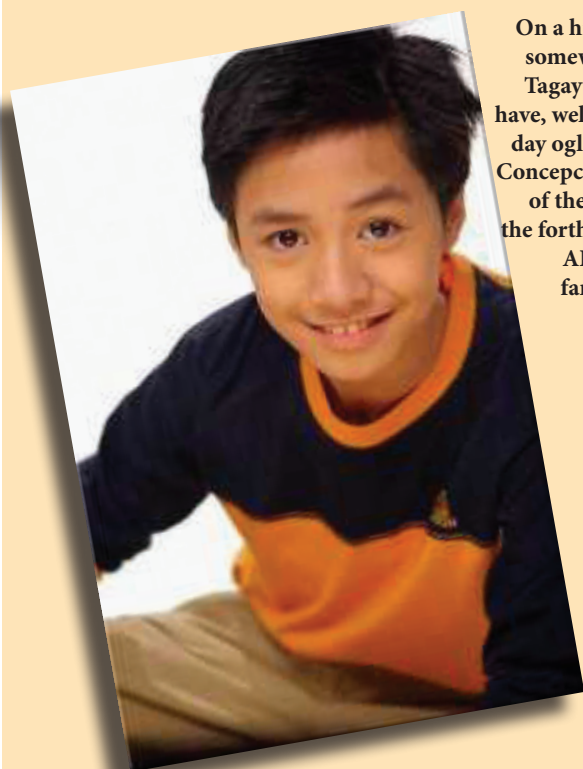
Zaira de la Peña, or Jessa of "Blusang Itim" fame, is having her makeup retouched and her tresses, curled.

Hunky Derek Ramsey, a.k.a. Machete, is wearing huge headphones, lost in music from his iPod-cellphone.

"I like relaxing music by Dave Matthews and Jason Mraz," he says. "I've been forewarned that shooting hours can be very long, but I honestly enjoy working with kids. If I were not an actor, I'd be a teacher."

Which is exactly his role in the fantaserye, by the way.

Call him Maestro Machete.



On a hilly field somewhere in Tagaytay, fans have, well, a field day ogling Sam Concepcion, one of the stars of the forthcoming ABS-CBN fantaserye "Super Inggo."

'We are family'

By BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR.
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Quite naturally, the new sitcom "John En Shirley," produced by KB Entertainment and the Kapamilya network, is a family affair.

The first taping day last week was "like gathering for Sunday lunch with the clan," said Maricel Soriano, a.k.a. Shirley. "It didn't feel like work at all. It was like magic. We kept laughing and chatting between takes."

It could be because they had all missed working together, Maricel explained. "Dolphy was my tatay (father) on 'John & Marsha' for almost two decades."

Classic comedy

As director Bert de Leon put it, Maricel literally grew up on the set of "John & Marsha," the comedy classic that ran from 1973 to 1990.

In the late 1970s, Direk Bert was working on the shows "Todas" and "Iskul Bukol," right next door to "John & Marsha" in Broadcast City.

"I used to visit the 'John & Marsha' set and I would shoot the breeze with Mang Dolphy," he recalled. "Every chance I got, I watched director Ading Fernando at work."

He met Maricel when she was still in pigtails and bobby socks. "I composed the theme song of the children's show 'Kaluskos Musmos,' where Maricel was one of the lead stars."

"John En Shirley" is produced by Kitchie Benedicto ("My boss when I was a kid," mused Maricel), whose family's station KBS 9 was the original home of "John & Marsha" and "Kaluskos Mus-



mos." Thus, in a lot of ways, it was a "homecoming" for Maricel.

On the other hand, the last time Maricel worked with Susan Roces was in the 1986 Regal movie, "Inday, Inday sa Balitaw," playing mother and daughter. "This time, she's my mother-in-law," Maricel said. "But we love each other on this show." Which made taping a breeze, she added, as they are like mother-and-daughter in real life.

There was just one sad note, Maricel said—missing "Mommy Marsha." That's actress Nida Blanca, who passed away five years ago.

Pick-up point

This spin-off is picking up where the original left off. Although Shirley is now married, she insists on taking care of dad John after the death of her mom and her brother Rolly's migration to the United States.

"I've always been partial to family shows,"

Direk Bert said. "This sitcom will show how a father and child's roles are reversed when the parent grows old."

"It's a comedy, but also about real life," Maricel explained. "It teaches us that laughter can make all problems bearable."

For Maricel Soriano, the first taping day last week of "John En Shirley" felt like a family affair. "It didn't feel like work at all. It was like magic. We kept laughing and chatting between takes."



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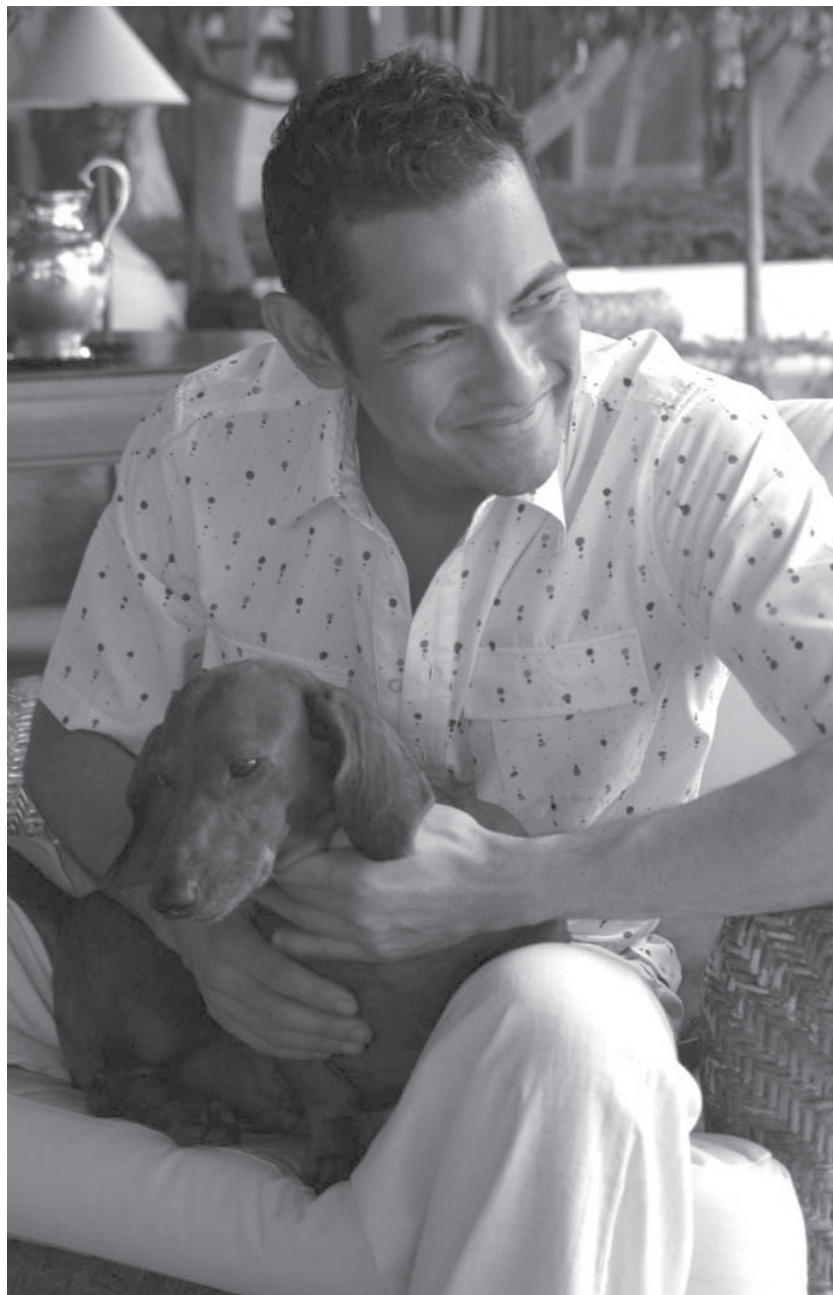
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Gary V.: Who am I to judge Martin and John?

...and he isn't bolting 'ASAP'

By BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR.
INQUIRER

It seemed unlikely for Gary Valenciano, Unicef goodwill ambassador and devout Christian, to get caught in controversies, but there was persistent talk that he was bolting ABS-CBN's Sunday musical-variety show "ASAP 2006," just like colleague and friend Martin Nievera.

Gary admitted he had heard the rumor, but insisted that he's very much content with the show—and network. "I'm happy with the people I work with. A lot can still be done to showcase the artists' best, but that's a challenge I'm willing to take with them. My coworkers want the same thing. It may take time, but for as long as [the network] is willing to listen, then we're okay."

So he's not leaving "ASAP"?

Gary Valenciano confirms that he is leaving ABS-CBN's Sunday musical-variety show "ASAP 2006" but not permanently.

"I'm leaving, but not permanently," he said.

Early next year, Gary is going to Los Angeles to study music production, sound engineering and film scoring at the Music Institute of Technology. Son Gabriel is enrolling in the same school.

He's eyeing the international gospel scene, he insisted; he's not out to compete with Martin, who's now a headliner in Las Vegas.

"I want to perform there, but I don't want to make Vegas my base," Gary clarified, adding that he'd be shuttling between Manila and LA.

He had just renewed his contract with ABS-CBN, he said. "It's a very flexible [deal] that can be adjusted [depending on] what may happen abroad. Martin doesn't have the same contract [with "ASAP"], but I felt I needed one, to protect the interests of both parties. Whenever I'm in town, I'm committed to the show."

Is Gary set to be godfather to Martin's soon-to-be-born son with long-time girlfriend Katrina Ojeda?

"I'm the ninong of Ram, his second son [with ex-wife Pops Fernandez]," Gary said. "When I asked Martin about Katrina's condition, he didn't deny it ... It's not for me to judge my

friend. I know Martin well. He has a golden heart."

As for Katrina, Gary finds her "nice." He said he was "praying for their continued happiness."

Another incident

Gary recently found himself in the middle of another incident—when he acted as referee to John Estrada and Jericho Rosales who had a showdown over Heart Evangelista at the Imax theater in SM Mall of Asia.

He recounted: "I don't look at it [like] I was caught in the middle. I just did what I felt was the right thing to do. Everyone felt the tension. I tried to convince them that it wasn't the right place to discuss the matter."

He corrected the impression that he had forced John to apologize to Jericho. "I only asked John: 'Is there anything you need to apologize about?' He said none, and it seemed that he didn't want to elaborate."

He wasn't the type to judge John, either, Gary said. "Whatever happened between John and Heart, Jericho and John ... that's none of my business. My only intention was to prevent something untoward. There's no telling what could've happened."

John Estrada sports a new butt

By DOLLY ANNE CARVAJAL
INQUIRER

John Estrada is now oozing with more sex appeal after undergoing hydrogel butt augmentation at Dr. Vicki Belo's clinic. It's the same one-hour procedure that Keanna Reeves went through. Since the body is primarily composed of water, Dr. Vicki says, it does not treat hydrogel as a foreign substance. So the new luscious bottom looks and feels natural.

Has it improved John's sex life? He smiles. "I'm celibate because my GF Vanessa is in Vancouver. I'll get to test the effect when I visit her soon." I asked him, "Is sex better with a girlfriend or a wife?" He laughs. "GF!"

John has always been touted as one of the few well-endowed actors. As Dr. Vicki naughtily says, "With his new butt, everything is now balanced down there for John."

But there's no more balancing act as far as his love life is concerned. "I have mellowed. I'm a one-woman man now," he says. He just shrugs off rumors about his flirting with Heart Evangelista while her BF Jericho Rosales was away. "It's so high school! A girl making sumbong to her BF that a guy wanted to pick her up at a bar just to see if he will get jealous. Whatever issues they have between them, I hope they stop dragging me into it. I'm too old for such kid stuff!"

Echo can rest assured that he has Heart all to himself because John surely left his heart in Canada.

Pops' cycles

My bosom friend Pops Fernandez is back in full swing. She is excited about her very first back-

to-back concert with Ogie Alcasid—"Two of A Kind"—on July 29, 7:30 p.m. at the Dusit Hotel Nikko Makati. Produced by Royale Era Entertainment, it features special guests Ritchie Paul Gutierrez and Gladys Guevarra. (Call 7272534 or 09198191389).

All the major upheavals Pipay has gone through in her personal life have only made her a more soulful chanteuse. Like lately, she had to come to terms with the fact that her ex-hubby Martin Nievera is having a baby boy with girlfriend Katrina Ojeda. "We both cried when we talked about it. Initially, I got hurt because he promised never to have a baby with another woman. But things happen. I have matured so I understand Martin more now. I can even afford to kid him about the whole thing. I asked him if he still knows how to change diapers and carry a baby. Our kids accept the situation. In fact they are now in the US vacationing with Mart and her."

What if, in one of their concerts, Martin acknowledges Katrina's presence in the audience? Pipay sighs. "After all we've been through, that shouldn't matter anymore. Believe me, Martin has done worse things before (laughs)." Is she planning to have a baby herself? "I'm not ready for such a big responsibility all over again but there are days I get inggit with girls who have babies. My time will come." Will Jomari Yllana be the father? She chuckles "I-pinpoint ba siya? Hahaha!"

She neither confirms nor denies her romance with Jom. "I've been single for the longest time. I don't know why some people make a big deal that Jom was seen in my house at an ungodly hour. It's my house and what if I'm free only at 1 a.m? I've reached a point where I don't give a damn anymore. Enough of the double standard na it's okay for separated men to have a gf but separated women are ostracized for having a bf. We are all entitled to be happy."

Her world has turned Popside down many times over. So why deprive her of the happiness she has found now? It's long overdue and rightfully hers.

Mark Herras and Jennylyn Mercado rekindle their "eternal love" in Regal Entertainment's "Eternity." Even if they have split up as lovers, their special bond is timeless.

"No matter where life takes me, Jen will always have a special place in my heart," Mark says.

Will it be from here to eternity or from here to maternity for the restless playboy? What kind of girl will "tame" him? "A girl who's exactly like me," he replies.

On-screen chemistry

Also featured in "Eternity" is the love team of Iza Calzado and Dingdong Dantes. They would have made a beautiful couple off-screen.

"Our love team works; why ruin it by getting entangled?" asks Iza, who's happy with her US-based boyfriend. "The long distance setup is tough," she says, "but it makes us value each other more."

Payback time

Mark Lapid says he put up his own MTL Films, whose initial offering is "Batas Militar," to give something back to show biz. Says the dashing governor, "Show biz put food on our table and sent us to good schools. I'm returning the favor."

Mark never dreamt of being a man in uniform. "I was a seminarian for three years," he reveals. Now he's one of the country's most eligible bachelors. However, he says his love life has been nil since his failed romance with Kris Aquino.

"It's useless to force something that wasn't meant to be," Mark says.

He has a cool relationship with his dad, he insists. "Hindi siya ang parating nasusunod. He also listens to what I have to say. Walang batas militar sa bahay namin (laughs)!"

Dismissed

Got a text from my amiga Alana Lopez-Montelibano: "Our criminal case of physical injuries against Aiko Melendez have been filed in court. All her cases against me and Happy Ongpauco have been dismissed."

Flimsy excuses

Somebody close to Jeremy Marquez called me up about an item on Jennylyn Mercado in my previous column. "Why is she denying that she keeps texting Jeremy? All her flimsy excuses only prove that she's hiding something."



Jericho Rosales has nothing to worry about the alleged flirtation between Heart Evangelista and John Estrada after the actor confirmed that there is nothing going on between him and Heart.

OPINYON

What educates and what does not

A popular American, then First Lady and now a senator from New York, once said that it takes a village to raise a child. Her statement has been widely accepted, and it is not because Hilary Clinton is who she is but more because what she said resonates with soundness.

If we are to agree that it takes a village to raise a child, what will it take to educate millions of students? Many, especially those who are so eager for Filipinos to better qualify as call center employees, say that making English the medium of instruction will turn things around for a mediocre educational system and studentry. All of a sudden, it now shifts away from the principle that it takes a village to raise a child towards attributing failure or success to the absence or presence of English as the medium of instruction.

While an incoming Secretary of Education is attributed with the intent to make English the medium of instruction, he only articulates what many others have said before him. Those who disagree with him for different reasons cannot blame him for an original thought or sentiment. But they can possibly blame him for forgetting that it takes a village, not English, to raise a child. Teaching in English or Filipino has bearing but is not the crux of the matter. It is the environment of the home and the community that sets the perspective of a child more than the language of instruction.

So much criticism has been leveled at the quality of education that the public school system delivers. From the beginning, criticisms of this sort squarely put total accountability on the shoulders of the educational system and its public school teachers. But a second and a third look are needed if only to respect the fact that the principal players include the students themselves. It is not only who is teaching that dictates the quality of learning. It is also who is learning that becomes a critical factor in the quality of education.

True, the quality of education must be the greater

responsibility of adults, especially teachers and school administrators. Public schools, however, operate within an even greater social and political system. It rests not solely, maybe not even largely, on public school teachers to decide the parameters of teaching. Budgets are estimated and requested by teachers, but it is the prerogative of other officials of government to approve, to reduce, to increase or eliminate what is being asked.

Even more than budgets, however, are the villages that raise the children. More than anything else, it is the home and community environment that sets the learning, or non-learning, framework of the students. It is not so much the technical content of subject matters that provide the most education but the physical and moral quality of the environment that raises the students.

How does one teach hygiene to a student without water in his home? How does one teach a virtue, like honesty, to those who have never seen it from their parents or their communities? Calling it hygiene, or “kalinisan,” calling it honesty, or “katotohanan,” hardly makes a difference. It is less the language than the quality of life, and shifting to English without shifting to a higher quality of life simply creates more English-speaking non-performers.

The shift to English is market-driven, they say. Is a shift to dignity and decency from mendicancy and abject poverty not more fundamental than what the market demands? Is a shift to honesty and integrity from opportunism and corruption not more crucial than the literary medium of instruction?

Virtues and vices are taught by example, not by language. Virtues and vices dictate how instructions are interpreted and applied. An innocent student would take a knife and prepare food with it. A juvenile delinquent would stab someone with it. What difference will English or Filipino make, except to say ouch or “aray”?

It is laudable that public officials are concerned

about what the market wants. It will even be more laudable if they are concerned about what a nation needs. More than English-speaking citizens, responsible and productive ones are needed. And poverty with its slums and survival mode of living will not produce responsibility and production. There is basis

There is basis for using English as the medium of instruction, just as there is basis for using Filipino—or Bisaya, for that matter. But a crook, a liar and a cheat will be a crook, liar or a thief in any language. What matters more is whether a student lives in dignity or not, whether a student has a decent home or a shanty, whether an environment is nurturing or criminal.

Dismantle poverty and opportunity takes its place. Opportunity provides choices, and choices raise the quality of life. The improved quality of life induces higher aspirations, and higher aspirations drive greater achievements. Language is peripheral, and progress is witnessed not only in English-speaking countries but also in Japan, in France, in Germany and in China, among others as well.

It is not English, or Filipino, that will save a sinking and troubled nation, but hard-working, honest and honorable Filipinos. It is not technology, but morality. It is not increased income, but better examples from our leaders and elders. It is not foreign investments, but local sacrifice. It is not ambition, but heroism.

Responses can be sent to jlmglimpses@gmail.com



Glimpses

By JOSE MA. MONTELIBANO
INQ7.NET

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Take pride in Filipino values

Blue eyes, blonde hair. That is beauty. Gucci, Guess, Dolce and Gabanna. That is being classy. BMW, Ford, GMC. Hot wheels. Dollars. That is the new Philippine peso. American. That is the new Filipino.

Basically, we desire to be Americans. That's why every Filipino parent prepares a grand fiesta when a daughter is engaged to a foreigner. Imported products fill the stores. Even the old value of virginity has been thrown into the dustbin because we follow the American culture.

It's not that I hate Americans. My point is that their identity is not ours. They are Americans. We are Filipinos. We may have been once their colony, but we are still not them. We will never be them. National identity cannot be changed; if we insist on changing it, we will only end up frustrated.

We should instead appreciate being Filipino. There burns a fire in us that no other nation has. We just don't see it that much.

As far as I can see, we are the most resourceful race. When it seems we've reached the end of the road, we still find a way. It is only in the Philippines that midwives can turn the transverse lie of a baby into cephalic position so the mother can deliver normally. In the United States, such a case would automatically call for Caesarean section.

Unlike in the United States, respect for our elders stands as the norm of our society. Here, answering parents when being corrected spells downright catastrophe. Even our superstitions warn against disrespect for elders. High school life in our country is not as traumatic as it is in the United States because we respect the authorities. As a result, we become more psychologically stable individuals than the Americans.

Filipino families are usually solid support systems, unlike in other nations. We stand together from one economic crisis to the next. Because we are able to unload our stress to our family, we have better levels of sanity than the Americans. Family members are so intimate with each other that siblings know each other's secrets and borrow one another's things. In our society, the problem of one becomes the problem of the whole family and even of the relatives. For us, our families are the fuel for our dreams. We want to catch the stars for those we love. Well, that is one noble thing in us worth admiring.

A people born into the nothingness of poverty, yet continuing to strive to be something for our families; a nation that respects the wisdom of the old in order to inspire the new generation, a race that amid deprivation produces a solution. That is the cream in Filipinos when unwrapped. So, before we ever desire to be Americans, think: Are resourcefulness, respect and family unity not worth the pride of being Filipinos?

Marie Franz Jeruta
via e-mail

The nursing boards and the larger mess

It is nothing new for us to hear about another scandal, another leakage, in a government licensing examination. There are persistent causes for the obsession to pass—if not “top”—exams by the proverbial hook or crook. What is new is the setting: the OFW-funded surge in enrollment in higher education, and the overseas placement-driven demand for new, board-certified graduates. It is this setting that makes board exam safeguards even more urgent, and the place of good university-level schools even more strategic.

The eternal, ever-present reasons are in a way so typically, wonderfully Pinoy. We all love diplomas. We hang them on walls, together with, for the older folk, framed graduation photos in cap and gown. Next, we love those board exams. Abroad, people see them as licensing exams that attest merely that the candidate has the minimum competence, nothing less, but also nothing more. Hereabouts, we think they prove that the candidate is a genius (step aside, Einstein), all of a sudden licensed to talk in strange technical jargon meant to impress rather than enlighten.

On the loftier, more romantic side, for the Filipino Everyman, degrees and board exams are the dramatic escape from one's assigned place in life; they are his entrée into the finer classes. Believe it or not, the feudal attitude that each of us is born into a fixed station and immutable status—something that most of the world began to chuck after the French

Revolution—still lingers deep in the chest of the Filipino. Commencement day and the oath-taking are tangible moments of release from that ordained pecking order. By token of parchment paper and ceremony, one's social and market worth is suddenly upgraded and, we proudly sermon the kids, that is an achievement that no one can take away from you

(by which we imply that everything else that came before was given by others who, therefore, can also take them back).

Board and bar exams are even more special. They are “blind-graded” exams, where the “teacher” doesn't know if the paper he is checking belongs to the daughter of Doña Buding or the son of Buding's “labandera” [laundrywoman]. They stand on equal footing before the grader, and to be treated equally is, again, believe it or not, a rarity in Filipino life. Everywhere else, he is judged by his clothes, his titles, his pedigree, his accent. Before the government boards, he competes solely on his own talent and strength. Board and bar exams therefore embody the meritocratic ideal, the pride in besting others in a fair and equal contest, the democratic romance about the level playing field.

That is why the scandal in the nursing board exams riles us so. Whoever leaked out those handwritten notes shortchanged all those honest students who took the exam on their own. Yet, unless the actual culprits and individual cheaters are found, the only proper course of action is to set aside the results of the tainted examination altogether. Its integrity has been breached, its results are not reliable. To compel the honest to retake an exam they have already passed—that makes them the innocent victims of other peoples' greed and cunning. That is sad, but that is a legitimate price to exact. To allow the cheaters to be board-certified and to profit from their crime—that leaves the public unprotected from the incompetent and rewards the dishonest with honors undeserved.

The nursing board's decision to release the results prematurely, while the investigation is ongoing, is a vintage move to silence the critics. Politically, it creates a solid constituency—all those who passed—who

will lobby that exam results be maintained. (I doubt if those who flunked will conversely have the incentive to either impugn the exam or testify on the leak. Even if they are thus “incentivized,” certainly they wouldn't have as much credibility as those who passed.)

Legally, the nursing board announcement may have (perhaps on purpose) “vested” certain rights in every person on the list of passers, unless the board had expressly made reservations when they issued that list. Either way, the board's undue haste raises even more questions.

We are wasting away a golden opportunity by allowing nursing education to succumb to the enticements of the market, when in fact the market can be harnessed to benefit nursing education.

Who could have imagined the blossoming of private universities fueled by overseas Filipino workers' money? The Filipino family, long smitten by fancy diplomas, all of a sudden has disposable income. And guess where he chooses to spend it first? The most noble, most natural path is the road to a school for his children, and he thus invests in a dream that will outlive him. We must make the most of this sudden surge in enrollment.

But nursing schools are even more uniquely situated. Like the rest of the colleges, they have applicants knocking at their gates. But even better, they have interested employers visiting the dean's office.

The papers have lamented the loose accreditation of nursing schools and the Commission on Higher Education's feeble enforcement of academic standards to accommodate powerful lobbies. The nursing board leakage is just the latest scandal that undermines public trust in the nurses produced by Philippine schools. The Filipino public may be forgiving and cheap, but the foreign public is exacting and demanding. The nursing school bonanza thrives because of the foreign public. To lose its trust just so shortsighted entrepreneurs can make a killing is to kill the goose that lays the golden egg.

Comments to passionforreason@gmail.com



Passion For Reason

By RAUL PANGALANGAN
INQUIRER

SAMU'T SARI



IN APPRECIATION

Filipino group CNMI Power receives a Certificate of Recognition from Saipan Chamber of Commerce executive director Christine Parke and DEQ coordinator Tina Sablan for participating in the recycling program during the Micronesian Games.



MICRO GAMES VOLUNTEERS

CNMI Power is presented with a Certificate of Recognition by Saipan Chamber of Commerce executive director Christine Parke and DEQ coordinator Tina Sablan for participating in the recycling program during the Micronesian Games. From June 23 to July 2, 2006, CNMI Power provided trash cleanup and ran recycling activities at Ada Gym and at the Miller Pub across the street.



SITE VISIT

Overseas Workers Welfare Administration officer Mary Dait pays a visit to the Filipino group CNMI Power during the organization's get-together on Sunday, July 16, 2006, at 13 Fishermen Pavilion.



SWEET SENTIMENTS

DEQ coordinator Tina Sablan, front, fifth from left, presents a cake with the words "Thank you volunteers" to members of the Filipino group CNMI Power. Besides organization members, others in picture are Rose Pangelinan, Christine Parke of the Saipan Chamber of Commerce, CNMI Power Local Adviser Lupe Manglona, and Steve Tilley, former CRM deputy director.



TREE PLANTING

Members of the Filipino group MOVERS participate in a tree-planting activity of the Beautify CNMI environmental group. MOVER also helped out during the Micronesian Games by providing trash cleanup and ran recycling activities at the MHS Athletes' Village.



RECYCLING WARRIORS

POWER Inc. volunteers are recognized for managing the Recycling Station at the Liberation Day Carnival every evening from June 2 to July 9, 2006. Here, members of the group get together to celebrate their achievements.